

# Educator's Guide

★ GREAT JEWISH LIVES ★

## RABBI AVRAHAM BLUMENTHAL

Father of Orphans



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## FOR THE TEACHER

This guide consists of lessons to assist you in using *Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal: Father of Orphans* in your classroom. The guide is written in a chapter-by-chapter format and includes a synopsis, pre-reading activities, and comprehension questions, as well as supplementary activities to be used at the end of the book.

The book and its accompanying guide can be used in a number of ways. Students reading at the same level might participate in a small-group guided reading of the book, returning to it over several weeks as they read and discuss it with the teacher. The entire class might read the book and discuss it in small groups using literature circles or reciprocal teaching. The teacher can then use the suggested questions to guide students in their discussions. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. Students should be encouraged to support their answers with evidence from the text. Students might keep a notebook of their responses throughout the year, which can then be used for progress monitoring and assessment purposes.

This teacher's guide includes many document-based questions. These questions focus on utilizing critical-thinking skills. Students are also asked to make comparisons, draw analogies, and apply historic analysis using primary and secondary sources from this time period. Source material for questions include photographs and documents. The questions can be used to teach students how to analyze source documents and deepen their understanding of the life and times of the person featured in this biography.

Using this guide can help you as a teacher create more active readers. Students who are encouraged to think about their reading, make inferences, compare and contrast events and characters, and notice author's language will read more closely and carefully. They will become more thoughtful readers, and their reading comprehension will improve. Working on this in the context of authentic literature helps to inspire a motivation and love for reading.

**SYNOPSIS** During World War I, many Jewish children in Jerusalem were orphaned. Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal created the Zion Orphanage to house these children. Rabbi Blumenthal became these children's father, caring for them day and night and teaching them to be good Jews.

## Pre-Reading Activities

Use one or more of the following activities to introduce the book.

1. **Predictions:** Preview the book by reading the title, the author, and looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think this book will be about? Have you read any other books in this series? What clues can you gather about the book from the phrase "Father of Orphans"?
2. **Building Background:** Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal lived in Jerusalem during the early 1900s. Give students background information on old Jerusalem, including a description of the difficulties faced by the Old Yishuv.
3. **Genre Focus:** *Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal: Father of Orphans* is a biography. This means that it tells the true story of a person's life. As you read this book, complete the graphic organizer at the end of this packet to describe Rabbi Blumenthal's character traits, life, and accomplishments.



## INTRODUCTION

1. What are some questions you now have about Rabbi Blumenthal? Note these questions and leave space to record their answers as you read the rest of the book.
2. When Rabbi Blumenthal was deathly ill, his father appeared to him and said, "It's not for you now, Avraham. Go home." What might this have meant?



## CHAPTER 1: A CHILD OF THE OLD CITY

**SYNOPSIS** Avraham Blumenthal grows up in the Old City of Jerusalem to a family that is wealthier than many others. When he is thirteen, his family leaves the Old City for Batei Ungarin. He marries and opens a school called the Boys' Boarding School.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out about Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal's childhood.

### Guided Questions


1. Compare and contrast the childhood of Avraham Blumenthal in Jerusalem of the late 1800s to childhood today. In what way were his games, food, and schooling similar to and different from life today?
2. "From a young age, Avraham knew he was different from his friends." In what ways was Avraham Blumenthal different from the other boys his age?
3. What was the system of *chalukah*? Why didn't the Blumenthal family receive *chalukah* money?
4. How was the neighborhood of Batei Ungarin different from the Old City, where the Jewish community lived until then?
5. Describe Rabbi Blumenthal's character as a young married man.

## CHAPTER 2: THE BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

**SYNOPSIS** The Ottoman Empire, which rules the Holy Land, joins World War I. This makes conditions very difficult for the Jews of Jerusalem, with disease and hunger filling the city.

➔ **Prompt:** Read to find out about the effects of World War I on the Jews of Jerusalem and specifically on the Blumenthal family.

### Guided Questions



1. What were some of the worries of the people of Jerusalem when the Ottoman Empire joined World War I?
2. Why was the Blumenthal family in a better position than some of their neighbors during this war?
3. Describe some of the effects of World War I on the people of Jerusalem.
4. Why were there Jewish children in the streets begging for water?
5.  **Document-based question:** Refer to the photograph of the wells on page 12. How did people get water in Jerusalem during the early 1900s? How was that water transported home?

## CHAPTER 3: AN ORPHANAGE IS BORN

**SYNOPSIS** Chacham Danon, Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, asks Rabbi Blumenthal to take in thirty orphans to the Boys' Boarding School. After consulting with Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, Rabbi Blumenthal agrees.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how Rabbi Blumenthal's orphanage is born.

### Guided Questions

1. Describe some of Rabbi Blumenthal's hesitations about opening an orphanage for the needy children.
2. Explain how the role of the Blumenthal family changed when the Boys' Boarding School turned into an orphanage.
-  3. **Creative writing:** Think about how Mrs. Blumenthal may have felt in this chapter. Write a letter from Mrs. Blumenthal to a friend describing her thoughts and feelings as her husband opened the orphanage.
-  4. **Document-based question:** When agreeing to take in the first group of orphans, Rabbi Blumenthal wrote in his letter to Chacham Danon, "Yes, we will take in the children. But I need your help to feed the children. We have no money to buy bread for them. Please ask the city's committees to give us money..." According to this document, what did Rabbi Blumenthal request from Chacham Danon? Why do you think this request was logical and fair?




## CHAPTER 4: THE FIRST CHILDREN

**SYNOPSIS** Rabbi Blumenthal opens his orphanage to the first group of needy children, and begins to address their basic physical needs.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how needy the orphans are and how Rabbi Blumenthal takes care of them in his new orphanage.

### Guided Questions

1. Describe the process a child went through when he first arrived at the orphanage.
2. How might an orphan child have felt when he was first brought to the orphanage?
3. Describe the daily life of an orphan on the streets of Jerusalem before he was brought to the orphanage. Contrast that to his life after he was admitted to Rabbi Blumenthal's orphanage.
4.  **Document-based question:** Refer to the photograph of the orphan on page 25. Identify three signs of his extreme poverty.




## CHAPTER 5: A SECOND GROUP

**SYNOPSIS** More and more children arrive at the orphanage, and a new building is rented for them on Yoel Street.

➔ **Prompt:** Read to find out how the orphanage grows.

### Guided Questions



1. Describe how the process of bringing a new child to the orphanage changed after the first group of orphans was brought in by Turkish police officers.
2. In what ways did Rabbi Blumenthal make sure to attend to each child's emotional and spiritual needs as well as his physical ones?
3. When Rabbi Blumenthal was asked about taking in additional children even though he had no space, "...[His] heart refused to allow him to say no." What kind of person was Rabbi Blumenthal? List some of his character traits, and support them with evidence from the text.
4.  **Document-based question:** Refer to the letter from the Turkish police officer on page 31. What was the letter requesting? Why might this letter have been written in both Hebrew and Arabic?

## CHAPTER 6: MONEY TROUBLES

**SYNOPSIS** As the orphanage grows, money becomes an issue, forcing Rabbi Blumenthal and his family to make many sacrifices to keep the orphanage open.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how Rabbi Blumenthal and his family keep the orphanage running despite financial difficulties.

### Guided Questions


1. Describe the process of the orphanage's growth from 15 to 132 children.
2. When there was not enough money to feed the children of the orphanage, what were some steps Rabbi Blumenthal took to get more money?
3. Although he got his daughter's necklace back from the pawnshop after Pesach, Rabbi Blumenthal "would borrow it from his daughter many times over the coming months." Why?
-  4. **Creative writing:** The Blumenthal family sacrificed in many ways to keep the orphanage open. Write about a time that you sacrificed for something that was important to you. What did you give up? What did you get in return?
-  5. **Document-based question:** Refer to the orphanage records on page 39. List five pieces of information that Rabbi Blumenthal noted for each child. Why do you think so many lines remained empty?

## CHAPTER 7: A BUSY SPRING AND SUMMER

**SYNOPSIS** A special committee, the Doctors' Committee, supplies money for bread as well as new clothing. A special holiday is marked in the orphanage when all the children receive new clothes.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how Rabbi Blumenthal takes care of the children's many needs.

### Guided Questions



1. Describe the meals that were provided to the children in the orphanage. Compare and contrast that with our typical school lunches served today.
2. Why did Rabbi Blumenthal instruct his daughters to sew new clothes for the children even though it was the month of Av?
3. Describe the celebration of Tu B'Av, August 3, 1917.
4.  **Document-based question:** Refer to the photograph of lunch in the orphanage dining room on page 48. How were the children served their food?

## CHAPTER 8: IN THE BATTLE LINES

**SYNOPSIS** World War I has been going on for several years, but now the Turks and the British begin to fight in the Holy Land. After one month of fighting, the British take control of Jerusalem, and the people of Jerusalem are unsure of what this will mean for them.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how Jerusalem is conquered from the Turks, and the effects this battle has on the orphanage.

### Guided Questions



1. Who was Mr. Hoeffin, and how did he help the growing orphanage?
2. Why were Jewish leaders being sent out of Jerusalem as the Turks prepared for war with the British?
-  3. **Creative writing:** Write a diary entry of one of the orphans for December 9, 1917. Be sure to include his thoughts and feelings about the British conquering Jerusalem.
-  4. **Document-based question:** Compare and contrast the Turkish army, shown in the photograph on page 53, to the British army, shown in the photograph on page 57. How are they similar, and how are they different?

## CHAPTER 9: THE WAR ENDS

**SYNOPSIS** When World War I ends, the orphanage once again moves to a new location, this one with much better conditions than its previous locations.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out where the orphanage moves after World War I and what is different about this new location.

### Guided Questions



1. Why was the new orphanage building nicknamed “The Palace”?
2. Rabbi Blumenthal may have purchased the field for educational as well as financial reasons. What lessons might he have wanted to teach the children with the purchase of this field to harvest wheat for matzos?
3. In addition to giving the orphans food, clothing, and shelter, Rabbi Blumenthal tried to teach them skills that would help them live on their own as adults. What kinds of skills did he teach them, and how?
-  4. **Creative writing:** Design a newspaper advertisement informing people that “The Palace” is for rent.
-  5. **Document-based question:** Refer to the photograph of the new orphanage building on page 62. What details do you notice that help justify the nickname “The Palace”?

## CHAPTER 10: DAILY LIFE IN THE ORPHANAGE

**SYNOPSIS** Rabbi Blumenthal cares for each child’s educational and emotional needs. When he is faced once again with financial difficulties, he travels to America for three years to raise funds, leaving his wife and son-in-law Fischel Zaks in charge.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out about the children’s daily schedule in the orphanage.

### Guided Questions


1. What were some new character traits of Rabbi Blumenthal that were developed in this chapter? Support each one with evidence from the text.
2. On page 70, it says about Rabbi Blumenthal, “He did what was best for the children — even if it was different.” Support this statement with details from the text.
3. What kind of person was Mrs. Blumenthal? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
-  4. **Creative writing:** Create a handout describing the daily schedule of the orphanage so a new orphan will know exactly what his day looks like.
-  5. **Document-based question:** Refer to the photograph on page 69 of children in the orphanage school. In what ways is their school similar to yours today? In what ways is it different?

## CHAPTER 11: NEW TIMES, NEW CHILDREN

**SYNOPSIS** As time goes on, the orphanage continues to grow and even establishes a second branch in Motza, called the Farming Orphanage, which runs for three years.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how some boys move on from the orphanage, while others continue to move in.

### Guided Questions


1. In what ways did Rabbi Blumenthal care for “his” children even after they left the orphanage?
2. Even though Rabbi Blumenthal could not take in the deaf child, in what ways did he show the grandmother how much he cared?
3. Rabbi Blumenthal was a creative thinker who looked for interesting ways to help the orphans grow and develop. Support this idea with evidence from the text.
4. If you lived in Rabbi Blumenthal’s orphanage, would you want to stay in Jerusalem or move to the Motza branch? Why?
5.  **Document-based question:** What details do you notice about the orphanage in Motza in the photograph on page 79?

## CHAPTER 12: WAR AGAIN!

**SYNOPSIS** During the 1948 war, Rabbi Blumenthal cares for the children of his orphanage through the hard times.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how Rabbi Blumenthal cares for the children of his orphanage when war breaks out in the city of Jerusalem.

### Guided Questions

1. In what ways did Rabbi Blumenthal encourage the orphans to keep in touch with whatever family members they had?
2. Describe the difficult conditions in Jerusalem during the 1948 battle for the city.
3. In what ways did Rabbi Blumenthal take care of his orphans during the 1948 war?
-  4. **Document-based question:** Refer to the photographs of daily life in the orphanage on pages 83 and 85. Find three details showing how children's physical needs were attended to in the orphanage.






## CHAPTER 13: AN END AND A BEGINNING

**SYNOPSIS** Rabbi Blumenthal gets older, and his grandson Rabbi Eliezer Rakovsky and his wife, Rivka, take over running the orphanage. He dies in 1966, and hundreds of his boys attend his funeral.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out about the end of Rabbi Blumenthal's life.

### Guided Questions

1. Why did Rabbi Blumenthal choose Eliezer and Rivka Rakovsky to run the orphanage at the end of his life?
2. Why do you think some of the orphans named their children after Mrs. Blumenthal?
3. What can we learn about Rabbi Blumenthal from the story of the voice that he heard from his bed at the end of his life?
4.  **Document-based question:** Study the photograph of Rabbi Blumenthal's funeral on page 97. Find two details in the photograph that show what an important person Rabbi Blumenthal was.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Use one or more of the following activities to conclude the book.



### Creative Writing

- **Letters:** There are many individual orphan children whose stories are told in this book. Choose one of these children and write a series of three letters from him — one from before he came to the orphanage, one from after his first few days, and one as an adult. Be sure to include his thoughts and feelings as well as actual descriptions of his life based on details in the book.
- **Newspaper:** Design the front page of a newspaper published on December 9, 1917.
- **Advertisement:** Imagine that the Zion Blumenthal Orphanage is seeking a new director. Create an advertisement for the position, including the important character traits necessary for the director.



### History

Review the author's note at the back of the book. Create a historical timeline of the founding and development of the Zion Blumenthal Orphanage.



### Craft

Using the primary sources and photos included in the book, create a scrapbook of the growth and development of the Zion Blumenthal Orphanage. Be sure to include a caption for each photo as well as some creative elements.

# Who Was Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal?

## ★ FACTS ★

**Year of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents' Names:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Year of Death:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Rabbi Avraham Blumenthal**

**His major accomplishments were:**

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**Some of his outstanding character traits were:**

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# Biography Sketch

## Physical Description

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## Actions

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## Name

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## His Thoughts and Feelings

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## What Others Say and Think about Him

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